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963 A report on window pane oysters fishery in Tuticorin bay

The window pane oysters (*Placenta placenta*) are fished regularly for pearls and shells from Kakinada Bay of Andhra Pradesh and Okhamandal Coast of Gulf of Kutch. Though not regular, these oysters were fished in the year 1995 and after a lapse of five years another fishing was conducted during February-March 2000 for pearls and shells by the local fisher folk in the Bay of Tuticorin. The size of oysters fished, their numbers and the incidence of natural pearls occurred in the oysters during February-March 2000 are reported here.

The window pane oysters inhabit the Tuticorin Bay at depths ranging from 0.5 to 3.5 m where the bottom was hard clayey. Profuse growth of sea grass was observed in most of the places and the oysters were found among the weeds half-buried in mud. They were collected by local fisher folk by hand picking during low tide. Fishing extended to 4-5 hours each day. Pearl harvest was done at the shore. An average of 50 persons, men, women and children were engaged in the fishery. Each person collect an average of 50 oysters per day and a total of 2500 oysters were collected every day from this area. The fishery continued for about 15 days and towards the last phase only few people participated in the fishery. 37,500 oysters were estimated to have been harvested during this period.

The minimum size of the window pane oyster fished during the pearl fishery measured 80 mm in length and the maximum size was 160 mm. Oysters less than 80 mm were not collected. The dominant size group was 111-120 mm which constituted 27.97% of the fished stock.

86.36% of oysters contained pearls. Maximum number of pearls found was 14 in a single oyster and the average incidence was three pearls per oyster (Fig.1). The occurrence of pearls was higher in the 105-110 mm size group. The smallest pearl recorded was 1.0 mm and largest one was 4.0 mm in dia. The dominant size of pearl was 2.6 to 3.0 mm constituting 37.14%. (Fig.2).



Fig. 1 Pearl extraction from window pane oyster



Fig. 2 Harvested natural pearls from window pane oyster

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